

Sir Josiah Child's Proposals,



For the Relief and Employment of the POOR.

This is a calm Subject, and thwarts no common or private interest amongst us, except that of the common Enemy of Mankind (*the Devil*) so I hope that what shall be offered towards the effecting of so universally acceptable a Work as this, and the removal of the innumerable inconveniences that do now and have in all Ages attended this Kingdom, through defect of such Provision for the Poor, will not be ill taken, although the Plaster at first essay do not exactly fit the Sore.

In the Discourse of this Subject, I shall first assert some particulars, which I think are agreed by common Consent, and from thence take occasion to proceed to what is more doubtful.

1. That our poor in England have always been in a most sad and wretched condition, some Famished for want of Bread, others starved with Cold and Nakedness, and many whole Families in all the out-Parts of Cities and great Towns, commonly remain in a languishing, nasty and useless Condition, Uncomfortable to themselves, and Unprofitable to the Kingdom, this is confessed and lamented by all Men.

2. That the Children of our Poor bred up in *Beggery and Laziness*, do by that means become not only of *unhealthy Bodies*, and more than ordinary subject to many loathsome Diseases, whereof very many die in their tender Age, and if any of them do arrive to years and strength, they are, by their idle habits contracted in their Youth, rendered for ever after indisposed to Labour, and serve only to stock the Kingdom with *Thieves and Beggars*.

3. That if all our impotent Poor were provided for, and those of both Sexes and all Ages that can do work of any kind, employed, it would redound some Hundreds of Thousands of Pounds per annum to the publick advantage.

4. That it is our Duty to God and Nature, so to Provide for, and Employ the Poor.

5. That by so doing one of the great sins (for which this Land ought to mourn) would be removed.

6. That our fore-Fathers had pious Intentions towards this Work, as appears by the many Statutes made by them to this purpose.

7. That there are places in the World, wherein the Poor are so provided for, and employed, as in Holland, Hambrough, New-England and others, and as I am informed now in the City of Paris.

Thus far we all agree: The first Question then that naturally occurs is, Question, How comes it to pass that in England we do not, nor ever did comfortably maintain and employ our Poor?

The common Answers to this Question are, two.

1. That our Laws to this purpose are as good as any in the World, but we fail in the execution.

▲

2. That

2. *That formerly in the days of our pious Ancestors the work was done, but now Charity is decreased, and that is the reason we see the Poor so neglected as now they are.*

In both which Answers (I humbly conceive) the Effect is mistaken for the Cause: For though it cannot be denied, but there hath been, and is a great failure in the Execution of those Statutes which relate to the poor, yet I say, the cause of that failure, hath been occasioned by defect of the Laws themselves.

For otherwise, what is the reason that in our late times of Confusion and Alteration, wherein almost every party in the Nation, at one time or other, took their turn at the Helm, and all had that Compass (those Laws) to Steer by, and yet none of them could, or ever did, conduct the Poor into a Harbour of security to them, and profit to the Kingdom, i. e. *none sufficiently maintained the impotent, and employed the Indigent amongst us*: and if this was never done in any Age, nor by any sort of Men whatsoever in this Kingdom, who had the use of those Laws now in force, it seems to me a very strong Argument that it never could, nor ever will be done by those Laws, and that consequently the defect lies in the Laws themselves, not in the Men, i. e. those that should put them in Execution.

As to the second Answer to the aforesaid Question, wherein *want of Charity* is assigned for another cause why the poor are now so much neglected, I think it is a scandalous, ungrounded Accusation of our Contemporaries (except in relation to building of Churches, which I confess this generation is not so propense to as former have been) for most that I converse with, are not so much troubled to part with their Money, as how to place it, that it may do good, and not hurt to the Kingdom: For, *if they give to the Beggars in the Streets, or at their Doors, they fear they may do hurt by encouraging that lazy unprofitable kind of Life; and if they give more than their proportions in their respective Parishes, that (they say) is but giving to the Rich, for the Poor are not set on Work thereby, nor have the more given them; but only their rich Neighbours pay the less.* And for what was given in Churches to the *visited Poor*, and to such as were *impoverished by the Fire*; we have heard of so many and great Abuses of that kind of Charity, that most men are under sad discouragements in relation thereunto.

I Write not this to divert any Man from Works of Charity of any kind: *He that gives to any in want does well, but he that gives to Employ and Educate the Poor, so as to render them useful to the Kingdom, in my judgement does better.*

And here by the way, not to leave Men at a loss how to dispose of what God shall incline their Hearts to give for the benefit of the Poor, I think it not impertinent to propose the Hospitals of this City, and poor labouring people that have many Children, and make a hard shift to sustain them by their industry, whereof there are multitudes in the out Parts of this City, as the best objects of Charity at present.

But to return to my purpose, viz. to prove that the want of Charity likewise that is now, and always hath been, in relation to the poor, proceeds from a defect in our Laws. Ask any Charitable minded Man as he goes along the Streets of London, viewing the Poor, viz. Boys, Girls, Men and Women of all Ages, and many in good Health, &c. why he and others do not take care for the

the setting these poor Creatures to Work? Will he not readily answer, that he wisheth heartily it could be done, though it cost him a great part of his Estate, but he is but one Man, and can do nothing towards, it, *giving them Money as hath been said, being but to bring them into a liking and continuance in that way.*

The second Question then is,

Question 2. *Wherein lies the defect of our present Laws relating to the poor?*

I answer, that there may be many, but I shall here take notice of one only, which I think to be Fundamental, and which untill altered, the poor in England can never be well provided for, or Employed; and that when the said Fundamental Error is well amended, it is almost impossible they should lack either Work or Maintenance.

The said radical Error I esteem to be the leaving it to the care of every Parish to maintain their own poor only; upon which follows the shifting off, sending or whipping back the poor Wanderers to the place of their Birth, or last abode: the practice whereof I have seen many years in London, to signifie as much as ever it will, which is just nothing of good to the Kingdom in general, or the Poor thereof, though it be sometimes by accident to some of them a Punishment without effect; I say without effect, because it reforms not the Party, nor disposeth the Minds of others to Obedience, which are the true ends of all Punishment.

As for instance, a poor idle Person, that will not Work, or that no Body will Employ in the Country, comes up to London to set up the Trade of Begging, such a Person probably may Beg up and down the Streets seven years, it may be seven and twenty, before any body asketh why she doth so, and if at length she hath the ill hap in some Parish to meet with a more vigilant Beadle than one of twenty of them are, all he does is but to lead her the length of five or six Houses into another Parish, and then concludes, as his Masters the Parishioners do, that he hath done the part of a most diligent Officer: but suppose he should yet go further to the end of his Line, which is the end of the Law; and the perfect Execution of his Office; that is, suppose he should carry this poor Wretch to a Justice of the Peace, and he should order the Delinquent to be Whipt, and sent from Parish to Parish, to the place of her Birth or first Abode, which not one Justice of twenty (through pity or other cause) will do, even this is a great charge upon the Country, and yet the business of the Nation it self wholly undone: for no sooner doth the Delinquent arrive at the place assigned, but for shame or idleness she presently deserts it, and wanders directly back, or some other way, hoping for better Fortune, whilst the Parish to which she is sent, knowing her a Lazy, and perhaps a worse quality'd Person, is as willing to be rid of her as she is to be gone from thence.

If it be here retorted upon me, that by my own Confession, much of this mischief happens by the Non, or ill Execution of the Laws, I say better Execution than you have seen you must not expect; and there was never a good Law made that was not well executed, the fault of the Law causing a failure of execution, it being natural to all Men to use the remedy next at hand, and rest satisfied with shifting the evil from their own Doors; which in regard they can so easily do, by threatening or thrusting a poor Body out of the

verge of their own *Parish*, it is unreasonable and vain to hope that ever it will be otherwise.

For the Laws against Inmates, and empowering the Parishioners to take a Security before they suffer any poor persons to Inhabit amongst them; it may be they were prudent Constitutions at the times they were made (and before *England* was a place of Trade) and may be so still in some Countries, but *I am sure in Cities and great Towns of Trade they are altogether improper, and contrary to the practice of other Cities and Trading Towns abroad.* The Riches of a *City*, as of a *Nation*, consisting in the multitude of *Inhabitants*; and if so, you must allow *Inmates*, or have a *City of Cottages*. And if a right course be taken for the sustentation of the *Poor*, and setting them on *Work*, you need invent no Stratagems to keep them out, but rather to bring them in. For the resort of *Poor* to a *City* or *Nation* well managed, is in effect the Conflux of Riches to that *City* or *Nation*; and therefore the subtle *Dutch* receive and relieve, or employ all that come to them, not enquiring what *Nation*, much less what *Parish* they are of.

Question 3. The third Question: *If the defect be in our Laws, how shall we find a remedy that may be rational and consistent?*

This I confess is a hard and difficult Question, it is one of the *ardua Regni*, and may very well deserve the most deliberate consideration of our wisest Councillors. And if a whole Session of *Parliament* were employed on this singular concern, I think it would be time spent as much to the Glory of God and good of this *Nation*, as in any thing that noble and worthy *Patriots* of their Country can be engaged in: But seeing I have adventured thus far, I shall humbly proceed to offer some general Proposals that have a tendency towards the effecting this great Work, which being seriously thought of and debated by wiser men, may be capable of such melioration as may render them in a great measure effectual to the *Kingdom* in general, although at present, to prevent that common Objection, that great Mutations are dangerous; I shall only propose them to be experimented in these parts of the *Kingdom*, which are the Vitals of our Body Politick, which being once made sound, the cure of the rest will not be difficult.

Proposition 1. First then I Propose, *That the City of London and Westminster, Burrough of Southwark, and all other places within the usual Lines of Communication, described in the Weekly Bills of Mortality, may by Act of Parliament be associated into one Province, or Line of Communication for relief of the Poor.*

2. *That there be one Assembly of Men (and such as they shall from time to time appoint and depute) entrusted with the care for, and treasure of all the Poor within the said Pale or Line of Communication.*

3. *That the said Assembly be incorporated by Act of Parliament, with perpetual Succession, by the Name of Fathers of the Poor, or some other honourable and significant Title.*

4. *That all Constables, Churchwardens, Overseers, or other Officers in all Parishes, within the said Line, be subordinate and accountable to the said Fathers of the Poor, and their Deputies, for, and in all things relating to the poor.*

5. *That the said Fathers of the Poor may have liberty to assess and receive into their common Treasury, for relief of the Poor, so much Money from every Parish as they yearly paid to that purpose any of the three Years preceeding this Constitution,*
and

and to compel the payment thereof, but not of more.

6. That the said Fathers of the Poor, and their Deputies, may have very large and sufficient power in all things relating to the poor, and particularly to have and receive the charitable benevolence of all persons, once every Lords Day, in every Parish-Church, and in any other Meeting of Pious Christians, and at any other time or times which they shall think fit.

7. That the said Fathers of the Poor, and such as they shall authorize, may have power to purchase Lands, erect and endow Work-houses, Hospitals, and Houses of Correction, and to exercise all other powers relating to the Poor, that any number of Justices of the Peace now may do, in their Quarter-Sessions, or otherwise.

8. That the said Fathers of the Poor, may have power to send such Poor beyond the Seas as they shall think fit into his Majesties Plantations, taking Security for their comfortable Maintenance during their service, and for their freedom afterwards.

9. That the said Fathers of the Poor may have Power to erect petty Banks, and Lombards for the benefit of the Poor, if they shall find it convenient, and also to receive the one half of what is paid at all the Doors of Play-houses, and have the Patent for Farthings, and to do whatever else his Majesty and the Parliament shall think fit to recommend to them, or leave to their discretion.

10. That the Treasure that shall be Collected for this purpose, shall be accounted sacred, and that it be Felony to misapply, conceal, lend, or convert it to any other use or purpose whatsoever.

11. That there be no Oaths, or other Tests imposed upon the said Fathers of the Poor, at their admission, to bar our Nonconformists, amongst whom there will be found some excellent Instruments for this good Work, and such as will constantly attend it (for if they be kept out, the People will be cold in their Charity, and in their hopes of the success.)

12. That the said Fathers of the Poor may constantly wear some honourable Medal, such as the King and Parliament shall devise, besides the Green Staff which is now used in London to such like purpose, (but upon extraordinary days only) to denote their Authority and Office at all times, and in all places, after the manner of the Habits in Spain, or rather as have all the Familiars of the Inquisition in most Romish Countries, with admirable effect, tho' to a wicked purpose; the consequence whereof will be, that the said Fathers of the Poor, being numerous, and dispers'd by their Habitations and Business, into most parts of their Province; will readily see any neglects of Officers, and as easily redress them; the Medal which they wear about them, being a sufficient Warrant to command Obedience from all Parish-Officers wherever they come, although their Persons be not known there.

13. That the said Fathers of the Poor may have liberty to admit into their Society, and all Powers and Privileges equal with them, any persons that are willing to serve God, their King and Country, in this pious and publick Work, the persons desiring to be so admitted, paying at their admission 100 l. or more into the Pours Treasury, as a demonstration of the sincerity of their Intentions to labour in and cultivate this most Religious Vineyard. This I only offer, because the number of the said Fathers of the Poor hereafter mention'd, may be thought rather too few than too many.

14. That the said Fathers of the Poor, besides the Authority now exercised by Justices

ces of the Peace, may have some less limited Powers given them, in relation to the punishment of their own, and Parish Officers, by pecuniary mulcts for the poors benefit in case of neglect, and otherwise as his Majesty and the Parliament shall think fit.

15. That the said Fathers of the Poor may have freedom to set the Poor on work about whatsoever Manufacture they think fit, with a Non-obstante to all Patents that have been or shall be granted to any private person or persons for the sole Manufacture of any Commodity, the want of which privileged, I have been told, was a prejudice to the Work-house at Clerkenwell, in their late design of setting their Poor Children about making of Hangings.

16. That all Vacancies by reason of Death of any of the said Fathers of the Poor, be perpetually supplied by Election of the Survivors.

Quest. 4. The fourth Question is, *Who shall be the Persons entrusted with so great a Work, and such excess of power?*

This is a Question likewise of some difficulty, and the more in regard of our present Differences in Religion, but I shall answer it as well as I can.

In general I say, *They must be such as the people must have ample satisfaction in, or else the whole design will be lost:* For if the universality of the People be not satisfied with the Persons, they will never part with their Money; but if they be well satisfied therein, they will be miraculously charitable.

Quest. 5. This begets a fifth Question, *What sort of men the People will be most satisfied in?*

I Answer, I think in none so well as such only as a Common Hall of the Livery-men of London shall make choice of, it being evident by the experience of many Ages, that the several Corporations in London are the best Administrators of what is left to Charitable Uses, that have ever been in this Kingdom, which is manifest in the regular, just and prudent management of the Hospitals of London, and was wisely observed by Dr. Collet, Dean of St. Paul's, that prudent Ecclesiastick, when he left the Government of that School, and other great Revenues assigned by him for charitable Uses, unto the disposition of the Mercers Company.

Object. But here it may be Objected, That Country Gentlemen, who have Power in places of their Residences, and pay out of their large Estates considerable summs towards the Maintenance of their Poor within the afore-limited Precincts, may be justly offended if they likewise have not a share in the distribution of what shall be raised to that purpose.

Ans. I answer, the force of this Objection may be much taken off, if the City be obliged to choose but a certain number out of the City, as suppose seventy for London, ten out of Southwark for that Burrough, twenty for Westminster, this would best satisfy the People, and I think do the work: But if it be thought too much for the City to have the choice of any more than their own seventy, the Justices of Peace in their Quarter-Sessions, may nominate and appoint their own number of Persons to assist for their respective Jurisdictions, and so to supply the vacancy in case of Death, &c. But all must be Conjunctive, but one Body Politick, or the work will never be done.

Quest. 6. The sixth Question is, *What will be the Advantage to the Kingdom in general, and to the Poor in particular, that will accrue by such a Society of men, more than is enjoyed by the Laws at present?*

I answer, Innumerable and unspeakable are the Benefits of this Kingdom that

that will arise from the Consultations and Debates of such a wise and honest Council, who being men so elected as aforesaid, will certainly conscionably study and labour to discharge their Trust in this service of God, their King, and Countrey.

1st. *The Poor, of what quality soever, as soon as they are met with, will be immediately relieved or set on Work where they are found, without hurrying them from place to place, and torturing their Bodies to no purpose.*

2. *Charitable-minded men will know certainly where to dispose of their Charity, so as it may be employed to right purposes.*

3. *House-keepers will be freed from the intollerable incumbrance of Beggars at their Doors.*

4. *The Plantations will be regularly supplied with Servants, and those that are sent thither well provided for.*

5. *The said Assembly will doubtless appoint some of their own Members to visit and relieve such as are sick, as often as there shall be occasion, together with Poor labouring Families both in City and Suburbs.*

6. *Poor Children will be instructed in Learning and Arts, and thereby rendered serviceable to their Countrey, and many other worthy Acts done for Publick good by the joynt Deliberation of so many Prudent and Pious Men, assisted with such a Power and Purse, more than can be foreseen or expressed by a Private Person.*

Quest. 7. The seventh Question may be, What shall all the Poor of these Cities and Countreies, being very numerous, be employed about?

This Question will be answer'd best by the said Assembly themselves when they have met and consulted together, who cannot be presumed deficient of Invention to set all the Poor on Work, especially since they may easily have admirable Preidents from the practice of Holland in this particular, and have already very good ones of their own, in the Orders of their Hospitals of Christ's Church and Bridewell in London; the Girls may be employed in mending the cloaths of the Aged, in Spinning, Carding, and other Linnen Manufactures, and many in Sowing Linnen for the Exchange, or any House-keepers that will put out Linnen to the Matrons that have the Government of them.

The Boys in picking Okam, making Pins, rasping Wood, making Hangings, or any other Manufactures of any kind, which whether it turns to present Profit or not, is not much material, the great Business of the Nation being first but to keep the Poor from Begging and Starving, and enuring such as are able to Labour and Discipline, that they may be hereafter useful Members to the Kingdom: But to conclude, I say the wisest Man, living solitarily, cannot propose or imagine such excellent ways and methods as will be invented by the united Wisdom of so grave an Assembly.

The sitting of the said Assembly I humbly conceive, ought to be, *De die in diem*; the *Quorum* not more than thirteen; whether they shall Yearly, Monthly or Weekly choose a President, how they shall distribute themselves into the several quarters of the Communication, what Treasurers and other Officers to employ, and where, and how many, will best be determined by themselves, and that without difficulty, because many that will probably be Members of the said Assembly, have already had large experience of the Government of the Hospitals of London; The manner of Election of the said *Fathers of the Poor*, I humbly

humbly suppose, cannot possibly be better contrived than after the same way which the *East-India-Company* choose their *Committee*, which will prevent the Confusion, Irregularity and Incertitude that may attend the Election of Voices, or holding up of Hands; especially because the Persons to be elected at one time will be very many; the said manner proposed is, every *Elector*, viz. every *Livery-man* to bring to *Guild-Hall* at the appointed day for Elections, a List of the whole number of Persons, such as he thinks fit that are to be Elected, and deliver the same openly unto such Persons as the *Lord Mayor*, *Aldermen*, and *Common-Council-Men* shall appoint to make the Scrutiny; which Persons so entrusted with the said Scrutiny, seven, or ten days after, as shall be thought fit, at another *Common-Hall* may declare who are the Persons Elected by the Majority of Votes.

If it be here objected to the whole purpose of this Treatise, that this Work may as well be done in distinct *Parishes*, if all *Parishes* were obliged to build *Work-houses*, and employ their Poor therein; as *Dorchester* and some others have done with good success.

I Answer, that such attempts have been made in many Places to my Knowledge, with very good intents and strenuous endeavours, but all that ever I heard of, proved vain and ineffectual, as I fear will that of *Clerkenwell*, except that single instance of the Town of *Dorchester*, which yet signifies nothing in Relation to the Kingdom in general, because all other places cannot do the like, nor doth the Town of *Dorchester* entertain any but their own Poor only, and Whip away all others; whereas that which I design, is to propose such a Foundation as shall be large, wise, honest, and rich enough to maintain and employ all Poor that come within the Pale of their Communication, without enquiring where they were born, or last inhabited: Which I dare affirm with Humility, that nothing but a *National*, or at least such a *Provincial* Purse can so well do, nor any Persons in this Kingdom, but such only as shall be pickt out by popular Election, for the Reason before alledged, viz. That in my Opinion, *three fourths* at least of the *Stock* must issue from the Charity of the People; as I doubt not but it will to a greater proportion, if they be satisfied in the *Managers* thereof; but if otherwise not the fortieth, I might say not the hundredth part.

I propose the Majority of the said *Fathers of the Poor* to be *Citizens* (though I am none myself) because I think a great share of the Money to be employed, must and will come from them, if ever the Work be well done, as also, because their Habitations are nearest the Center of their Business, and they best acquainted with all Affairs of this Nature by their experience in the Government of the *Hospitals*.

Earnestly to desire and endeavour, that the Poor of *England* should be better provided for and employed, is a Work that was much studied by my deceased *Father*, and therefore though I be as ready to confess as any shall be to charge me with Disability to propose a Model of Laws for this great Affair, yet I hope the more ingenious will pardon me for endeavouring to give aim towards it, since it is so much my Duty, which in this particular I shall be careful to perform (though I may be too remiss in others) as shall appear by more visible and apparent Demonstrations, if ever this design, or any other (that is like to effect what is desired) succeed.

r
d
ge-
I
ls
o
ie
at.

224